

JEAN BAUDRILLARD

IN

THE SHADOW OF THE SILENT

MAJORITIES

. . . OR

THE END OF THE SOCIAL

AND OTHER ESSAYS

**Translated by Paul Foss,
Paul Patton and John Johnston**



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Contents

In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities	1
. . . Or, The End of the Social	65
The Implosion of Meaning in the Media	95
Our Theater of Cruelty	113

The whole chaotic constellation of the social revolves around that spongy referent, that opaque but equally translucent reality, that nothingness: the masses. A statistical crystal ball, the masses are "swirling with currents and flows," in the image of matter and the natural elements. So at least they are represented to us. They can be "mesmerized," the social envelops them, like static electricity; but most of the time, precisely, they form an earth*, that is, they absorb all the

**Translator's Note:* Throughout the text "*la masse*," "*faire masse*" imply a condensation of terms which allows Baudrillard to make a number of central puns and allusions. For not only does *la masse* directly refer to the physical and philosophical sense of "substance" or "matter," it can just as easily mean "the majority" (as in "the mass of workers") or even the electrical usage of an "earth"; hence *faire masse* can simultaneously mean *to form a mass*, *to form an earth* or *to form a majority*.

electricity of the social and political and neutralise it forever. They are neither good conductors of the political, nor good conductors of the social, nor good conductors of meaning in general. Everything flows through them, everything magnetises them, but diffuses throughout them without leaving a trace. And, ultimately, the appeal to the masses has always gone unanswered. They do not radiate; on the contrary, they absorb all radiation from the outlying constellations of State, History, Culture, Meaning. They are inertia, the strength of inertia, the strength of the neutral.

In this sense, the mass is characteristic of our modernity, as a highly implosive phenomenon, irreducible for any traditional theory and practice, even perhaps for any theory and practice at all.

According to their imaginary representation, the masses drift somewhere between passivity and wild spontaneity, but always as a potential energy, a reservoir of the social and of social energy; today a mute referent, tomorrow, when they speak up and cease to be the "silent majority," a protagonist of history — now, in fact, the masses have no history to write, neither

past nor future, they have no virtual energies to release, nor any desire to fulfill: their strength is *actual*, in the present, and sufficient unto itself. It consists in their silence, in their capacity to absorb and neutralise, already superior to any power acting upon them. It is a specific inertial strength, whose effectivity differs from that of all those schemas of production, radiation and expansion according to which our imaginary functions, even in its wish to destroy those same schemas. An unacceptable and unintelligible figure of implosion (is this still a "process"?) — stumbling block to all our systems of meaning, against which they summon all their resistance, and screening, with a renewed outbreak of signification, with a blaze of signifiers, the central collapse of meaning.

The social void is scattered with interstitial objects and crystalline clusters which spin around and coalesce in a cerebral chiaroscuro. So is the mass, an *in vacuo* aggregation of individual particles, refuse of the social and of media impulses: an opaque nebula whose

growing density absorbs all the surrounding energy and light rays, to collapse finally under its own weight. A black hole which engulfs the social.

This is, therefore, exactly the reverse of a "sociological" understanding. Sociology can only depict the expansion of the social and its vicissitudes. It survives only on the positive and definitive hypothesis of the social. The reabsorption, the implosion of the social escapes it. The hypothesis of the death of the social is also that of its own death.

The term "mass" is not a concept. It is a leitmotif of political demagogy, a soft, sticky, lumpenanalytical notion. A good sociology would attempt to surpass it with "more subtle" categories: socio-professional ones, categories of class, cultural status, etc. Wrong: it is by prowling around these soft and acritical notions (like "mana" once was) that one can go further than intelligent critical sociology. Besides, it will be noticed retrospectively that the concepts "class," "social relations," "power," "status," "institution" — and "social" itself — all those too explicit concepts which are the glory of the legitimate sciences, have also

only ever been muddled notions themselves, but notions upon which agreement has nevertheless been reached for mysterious ends: those of preserving a certain code of analysis.

To want to specify the term "mass" is a mistake — it is to provide meaning for that which has none. One says: "the mass of workers." But the mass is never that of the workers, nor of any other social subject or object. The "peasant masses" of old were not in fact masses: only those form a mass who are freed from their symbolic bondage, "released" (only to be caught in infinite "networks") and destined to be no more than the innumerable end points of precisely those same theoretical models which do not succeed in integrating them and which finally only produce them as statistical refuse. The mass is without attribute, predicate, quality, reference. This is its definition, or its radical lack of definition. It has no sociological "reality." It has nothing to do with any *real* population, body or specific social aggregate. Any attempt to qualify it only seeks to transfer it back to sociology and rescue it from

this indistinctness which is not even that of equivalence (the unlimited sum of equivalent individuals: $1+1+1$ — such is the sociological definition), but that of the *neutral*, that is to say *neither one nor the other* (ne-uter).

There is no longer any polarity between the one and the other in the mass. This is what causes that vacuum and inwardly collapsing effect in all those systems which survive on the separation and distinction of poles (two, or many in more complex systems). This is what makes the circulation of meaning within the mass impossible: it is instantaneously dispersed, like atoms in a void. This is also what makes it impossible for the mass to be *alienated*, since neither the one nor *the other* exist there any longer.

A speechless mass for every hollow spokesman without a past. Admirable conjunction, between those who have nothing to say, and the masses, who do not speak. Ominous emptiness of all discourse. No hysteria or potential fascism, but simulation by precipitation of every lost referential. Black box of every referential, of every uncaptured meaning, of impossible history, of untraceable systems of representation, the mass is what remains when the social has been

completely removed.

Regarding the impossibility of making meaning circulate among the masses, the best example is God. The masses have hardly retained anything but the image of him, never the Idea. They have never been affected by the Idea of God, which has remained a matter for the clergy, nor by anguish over sin and personal salvation. What they have retained is the enchantment of saints and martyrs; the last judgment; the Dance of Death; sorcery; the ceremony and spectacle of the Church; the immanence of ritual — the contrast to the transcendence of the Idea. They were and have remained pagans, in their way, never haunted by the Supreme Authority, but surviving on the small change of images, superstition and the devil. Degraded practices with regard to the spiritual wager of faith? Indeed. It is their particular way, through the banality of rituals and profane simulacra, of refusing the categorical imperative of morality and faith, the sublime imperative of *meaning*, which they have always re-

jected. It isn't that they have not been able to attain the higher enlightenment of religion: they have ignored it. They don't refuse to die for a faith, for a cause, for an idol. What they refuse is transcendence; the uncertainty, the difference, the waiting, the asceticism which constitute the sublime exaction of religion. For the masses, the Kingdom of God has always been already here on earth, in the pagan immanence of images, in the spectacle of it presented by the Church. Fantastic distortion of the religious principle. The masses have absorbed religion by their sorcerous and spectacular manner of practising it.

All the great schemas of reason have suffered the same fate. They have only traced their trajectory, they have only followed the thread of their history along the thin edge of the social stratum bearing meaning (and in particular of the stratum bearing social meaning), and on the whole they have only penetrated into the masses at the cost of their misappropriation, of their radical distortion. So it was with Historical Reason, Political Reason, Cultural Reason, Revolutionary Reason — so even with the very Reason of the Social, the most interesting since this seems inherent to the masses, and appears to

have produced them throughout its evolution. Are the masses the “mirror of the social”? No, they don’t reflect the social, nor are they reflected in the social — it is the mirror of the social which shatters to pieces on them.

Even this image is not right, since it still evokes the idea of a hard substance, of an opaque resistance. Rather, the masses function as a gigantic black hole which inexorably inflects, bends and distorts all energy and light radiation approaching it: an implosive sphere, in which the curvature of spaces accelerates, in which all dimensions curve back on themselves and “involve” to the point of annihilation, leaving in their stead only a sphere of potential engulfment.

The Abyss of Meaning

So it is with information.

Whatever its political, pedagogical, cultural content, the plan is always to get some meaning across, to keep the masses *within reason*; an imperative to produce meaning that takes the form of the constantly repeated imperative to moralise

information: to better inform, to better socialise, to raise the cultural level of the masses, etc. Nonsense: the masses scandalously resist this imperative of rational communication. They are given meaning: they want spectacle. No effort has been able to convert them to the seriousness of the content, nor even to the seriousness of the code. Messages are given to them, they only want some sign, they idolise the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolise any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence. What they reject is the "dialectic" of meaning. Nor is anything served by alleging that they are mystified. This is always a hypocritical hypothesis which protects the intellectual complaisance of the producers of meaning: the masses spontaneously aspire to the natural light of reason. This in order to evade the reverse hypothesis, namely that it is in complete "freedom" that the masses oppose their refusal of meaning and their will to spectacle to the ultimatum of meaning. They distrust, as with death, this transparency and this *political* will. They scent the simplifying terror which is behind the ideal hegemony of meaning, and they react in their own way, by reducing all articulate discourse to a single irra-

tional and baseless dimension, where signs lose their meaning and peter out in fascination: the spectacular.

Once again, it is not a question of mystification: it is a question of their own exigencies, of an explicit and positive counter-strategy — the task of absorbing and annihilating culture, knowledge, power, the social. An immemorial task, but one which assumes its full scope today. A deep antagonism which forces the inversion of received scenarios: it is no longer meaning which would be the ideal line of force in our societies, that which eludes it being only waste intended for reabsorption some time or other — on the contrary, it is meaning which is only an ambiguous and inconsequential accident, an effect due to ideal convergence of a perspective space at any given moment (History, Power, etc.) and which, moreover, has only ever really concerned a tiny fraction and superficial layer of our "societies." And this is true of individuals also: we are only episodic conductors of meaning, for in the main, and profoundly, we *form a mass*, living most of the time in panic or haphazardly, above and beyond any meaning.

Now, with this inverse hypothesis, every-

thing changes.

Take one example from a thousand concerning this contempt for meaning, the folklore of silent passivities.

On the night of Klaus Croissant's extradition, the TV transmitted a football match in which France played to qualify for the world cup. Some hundreds of people demonstrated outside la Sante, a few barristers ran to and fro in the night; twenty million people spent their evening glued to the screen. An explosion of popular joy when France won. Consternation and indignation of the illuminati over this scandalous indifference. *La Monde*: "9 pm. At that time the German barrister had already been taken out of la Sante. A few minutes later, Rocheteau scored the first goal." Melodrama of indignation.¹ Not a single query about the mystery of this indifference. One same reason is always invoked: the manipulation of the masses by power, their mystification by football. In any case, this indifference *ought* not to be, hence it has nothing to

tell us. In other words, the "silent majority" is even stripped of its indifference, it has no right even that this be recognised and imputed to it, even this apathy must have been imposed on it by power.

What contempt behind this interpretation! Mystified, the masses are not allowed their own behavior. Occasionally, they are conceded a revolutionary spontaneity by which they glimpse the "rationality of their own desire," that yes, but God protect us from their silence and their inertia. It is exactly this indifference, however, that demands to be analysed in its *positive* brutality, instead of being dismissed as white magic, or as a magic alienation which always turns the multitudes away from their revolutionary vocation.

Moreover, how does it succeed in turning them away? Can one ask questions about the strange fact that, after several revolutions and a century or two of political apprenticeship, in spite of the newspapers, the trade unions, the parties, the intellectuals and all the energy put into educating and mobilising the people, there are still (and it will be exactly the same in ten or twenty years) a thousand persons who stand up and twenty million who remain "passive" — and not

only passive, but who, in all good faith and with glee and without even asking themselves why, frankly prefer a football match to a human and political drama? It is curious that this proven fact has never succeeded in making political analysis shift ground, but on the contrary reinforces it in its vision of an omnipotent, manipulatory power, and a mass prostrate in an unintelligible coma. Now none of this is true, and both the above are a deception: power manipulates nothing, the masses are neither misled nor mystified. Power is only too happy to make football bear a facile responsibility, even to take upon itself the diabolical responsibility for stupefying the masses. This comforts it in its illusion of being power, and leads away from the much more dangerous fact that this indifference of the masses is their true, their only practice, that there is no other ideal of them to imagine, nothing in this to deplore, but everything to analyse as the brute fact of a collective retaliation and of a refusal to participate in the recommended ideals, however enlightened.

What is at stake in the masses lies elsewhere. We might as well take note and recognise that any hope of revolution, the whole promise of the social and of social change has only been able to function up till now thanks to this dodging of the issue, this fantastic denial. We might as well begin again, as Freud did in the psychic order,² from this remainder, from this blind sediment, from this waste or refuse of meaning, from this unanalysed and perhaps unanalysable fact (there is a good reason why such a Copernican Revolution has never been undertaken in the political universe: it is the whole political order that is in danger of paying the price).

Rise and Fall of the Political

The political and the social seem inseparable to us, twin constellations, since at least the French Revolution, under the sign (determinant or not) of the economic. But for us today, this undoubtedly is only true of their simultaneous decline.

When the political emerged during the Renaissance from the religious and ecclesiastic spheres, to win reknown with Machiavelli, it was at first only a pure game of signs, a pure strategy which was not burdened with any social or historical "truth," but, on the contrary, played on the absence of truth (as did later the worldly strategy of the Jesuits on the absence of God). To begin with, the political space belonged to the same order as that of Renaissance mechanical theatre, or of perspective space in painting, which were invented at the same time. Its form was that of a game, not of a system of representation — semiurgy and strategy, not ideology — its function was one of virtuosity, not of truth (hence the game, subtle and a corollary to this, of Balthazar Gracian in *Homme de Cour*). The cynicism and immorality of Machiavellian politics lay there: not as the vulgar understanding has it in the unscrupulous usage of means, but in the offhand disregard for ends. Now, as Nietzsche well knew, it is in this disregard for a social, psychological, historical truth, in this exercise of simulacra as such, that the maximum of political energy is found, where the political is a game and is not yet given a reason.

It is since the eighteenth century, and particularly since the Revolution, that the political has taken a decisive turn. It took upon itself a social reference, the social invested it. At the same time, it entered into representation, its performance became dominated by representative mechanisms (theatre pursued a parallel fate: it became a representative theatre — likewise for perspective space: machinery at the start, it became the place where a truth of space and of representation was inscribed). The political scene became that of the evocation of a fundamental signified: the people, the will of the people, etc. It no longer worked on signs alone, but on meaning; henceforth summoned to best signify the real it expressed, summoned to become transparent, to moralise itself and to respond to the social ideal of good representation. For a long time, nevertheless, a balance came into play between the proper sphere of the political and the forces reflected in it: the social, the historical, the economic. Undoubtedly this balance corresponds to the golden age of bourgeois represen-

tative systems (constitutionality: eighteenth-century England, the United States of America, the France of bourgeois revolutions, the Europe of 1848).

It is with marxist thought, in its successive developments, that the end of the political and of its particular energy was inaugurated. Here began the absolute hegemony of the social and the economic, and the compulsion, on the part of the political, to become the legislative, institutional, executive mirror of the social. The autonomy of the political was inversely proportional to the growing hegemony of the social.

Liberal thought always thrives on a kind of nostalgic dialectic between the two, but socialist thought, revolutionary thought openly postulates a dissolution of the political at some point in history, in the final transparency of the social.

The social won. But, at this point of generalisation, of saturation, where it is no more than the zero degree of the political, at this point of absolute reference, of omnipresence and diffraction in all the interstices of physical and mental space, what becomes of the social itself? It is the sign of its end: the energy of the social is reversed, its

specificity is lost, its historical quality and its ideality vanish in favour of a configuration where not only the political becomes volatilised, but where the social itself no longer has any name. Anonymous. THE MASS. THE MASSES.

The Silent Majority

The dwindling of the political from a pure strategic arrangement to a system of representation, then to the present scenario of neo-figuration, where the system continues under the same manifold signs but where these no longer represent anything and no longer have their "equivalent" in a "reality" or a real social substance: there is no longer any political investiture because there is no longer even any social referent of the classical kind (a people, a class, a proletariat, objective conditions) to lend force to effective political signs. Quite simply, there is no longer any social signified to give force to a political signifier.

The only referent which still functions is that of the silent majority. All contemporary

systems function on this nebulous entity, on this floating substance whose existence is no longer social, but statistical, and whose only mode of appearance is that of the survey. A simulation on the horizon of the social, or rather on whose horizon the social has already disappeared.

That the silent majority (or the masses) is an imaginary referent does not mean they don't exist. It means that *their representation is no longer possible*. The masses are no longer a referent because they no longer belong to the order of representation. They don't express themselves, they are surveyed. They don't reflect upon themselves, they are tested. The referendum (and the media are a constant referendum of directed questions and answers) has been substituted for the political referent. Now polls, tests, the referendum, media are devices which no longer belong to a dimension of representations, but to one of simulation. They no longer have a referent in view, but a model. Here, revolution in relation to the devices of classical sociality (of which elections, institutions, the instances of representation, and even of repression, still form a part) is complete: in all this, social meaning still flows

between one pole and another, in a dialectical structure which allows for a political stake and contradictions.

Everything changes with the device of simulation. In the couple "silent majority/survey" for example, there is no longer any pole nor any differential term, hence no electricity of the social either: it is short-circuited by the confusing of poles, in a total circularity of signalling (exactly as is the case with molecular communication and with the substance it informs in DNA and the genetic code). This is the ideal form of simulation: collapse of poles, orbital circulation of models (this is also the matrix of every implosive process).

Bombarded with stimuli, messages and tests, the masses are simply an opaque, blind stratum, like those clusters of stellar gas known only through analysis of their light spectrum — radiation spectrum equivalent to statistics and surveys — but precisely: it can no longer be a question of expression or representation, but only of the simulation of an ever inexpressible and unexpressed social. This is the meaning of

their silence. But this silence is paradoxical — it isn't a silence which does not speak, it is a silence which *refuses to be spoken for in its name*. And in this sense, far from being a form of alienation, it is an absolute weapon.

No one can be said to represent the silent majority, and that is its revenge. The masses are no longer an authority to which one might refer as one formerly referred to class or to the people. Withdrawn into their silence, they are no longer (a) *subject* (especially not to — or of — history), hence they can no longer be spoken for, articulated, represented, nor pass through the political "mirror stage" and the cycle of imaginary identifications. One sees what strength results from this: no longer being (a) subject, *they can no longer be alienated* — neither in their own language (they have none), nor in any other which would pretend to speak for them. The end of revolutionary convictions. For these have always speculated on the possibility of the masses, or the proletariat, denying themselves as such. But the mass is not a place of negativity or explosion, it is a place of absorption and implosion.

Inaccessible to schemas of liberation, revolution and historicity; this is its mode of defense, its

particular mode of retaliation. Model of simulation and imaginary referent for use by a phantom political class which now no longer knows what kind of "power" it wields over it, the mass is at the same time the death, the end of this political process thought to rule over it. And into it is engulfed the political as will and representation.

The strategy of power has long seemed founded on the apathy of the masses. The more passive they were, the more secure it was. But this logic is only characteristic of the bureaucratic and centralist phase of power. And it is this which today turns against it: the inertia it has fostered becomes the sign of its own death. That is why it seeks to reverse its strategies: from passivity to participation, from silence to speech. But it is too late. The threshold of the "critical mass," that of the involution of the social through inertia, is exceeded.³

Everywhere the masses are encouraged to speak, they are urged to live socially, electorally, organisationally, sexually, in participation, in festival, in free speech, etc. The spectre must be exorcised, it must pronounce its name. Nothing shows more dramatically that the only genuine problem today is the silence of the mass, the

silence of the silent majority.

All reserves are exhausted in maintaining this mass in controlled emulsion and in preventing it from falling back into its panic-inducing inertia and its silence. No longer being under the reign of will or representation, it falls under the province of diagnosis, or divination pure and simple — whence the universal reign of information and statistics: we must auscultate it, sound it out, unearth some oracle from within it. Whence the mania for seduction, solicitude and all the sollicitation surrounding it. Whence prediction by resonance, the effects of forecasting and of an illusory mass outlook: "The French people think . . . The majority of Germans disapprove . . . All England thrilled to the birth of the Prince . . . etc." — a mirror held out for an ever blind, ever absent recognition.

Whence that bombardment of signs which the mass is thought to re-echo. It is interrogated by converging waves, by light or linguistic stimuli, exactly like distant stars or nuclei bombarded with particles in a cyclotron. Information is exactly this. Not a mode of communication or

of meaning, but a mode of constant emulsion, of input-output and of controlled chain reactions, exactly as in atomic simulation chambers. We must free the "energy" of the mass in order to fabricate the "social."

But it is a contradictory process, for information and security, in all their forms, instead of intensifying or creating the "social relation," are on the contrary entropic processes, modalities of the end of the social.

It is thought that the masses may be structured by injecting them with information, their captive social energy is believed to be released by means of information and messages (today it is no longer the institutional grid as such, rather it is the quantity of information and the degree of media exposure which measures socialisation). Quite the contrary. Instead of transforming the mass into energy, information produces even more mass. Instead of informing as it claims, instead of giving form and structure, information neutralises even further the "social field"; more and more it creates an inert mass impermeable to the classical institutions of the social, and to the very contents of information. Today, replacing the fission of symbolic structures by the social

and its rational violence, is the fission of the social itself by the "irrational" violence of media and information — the final result being precisely an atomised, nuclearised, molecularised mass, the result of two centuries of accelerated socialisation and which brings it irremediably to an end.

The mass is only mass because its social energy has already frozen. It is a cold reservoir, capable of absorbing and neutralising any hot energy. It resembles those half-dead systems into which more energy is injected than is withdrawn, those paid-out deposits exorbitantly maintained in a state of artificial exploitation.

Immense energy is expended in mitigating the tendentially declining rate of political investment and the absolute fragility of the social principle of reality, in maintaining this simulation of the social and in preventing it from totally imploding. And the system risks being swallowed up by it.

Basically, what goes for commodities also goes for meaning. For a long time capital only

had to produce goods; consumption ran by itself. Today it is necessary to produce consumers, to produce demand, and this production is infinitely more costly than that of goods (for the most part, and above all since 1929, the social arose out of this crisis of demand: the production of demand largely overlaps the production of the social itself).⁴ For a long time it was enough for power to produce meaning (political, ideological, cultural, sexual), and the demand followed; it absorbed supply and still surpassed it. Meaning was in short supply, and all the revolutionaries offered themselves to produce still more. Today, everything has changed: no longer is meaning in short supply, it is produced everywhere, in ever increasing quantities — it is demand which is weakening. And it is the *production of this demand for meaning* which has become crucial for the system. Without this demand for, without this susceptibility to, without this minimal participation in meaning, power is nothing but an empty simulacrum and an isolated effect of perspective. Here, too, the production of demand is infinitely more costly than the production of meaning itself. Beyond a certain point, it is impossible, all the energy mustered by the system

will no longer be enough. The demand for objects and for services can always be artificially produced, at a high, but accessible cost; the system has proved this. The desire for meaning, when it is in short supply, and the desire for reality, when it is weakening everywhere, cannot be made good and together threaten total ruin.

The mass absorbs all the social energy, but no longer refracts it. It absorbs every sign and every meaning, but no longer reflects them. It absorbs all messages and digests them. For every question put to it, it sends back a tautological and circular response.⁵ It never participates. Inundated by flows and tests, it *forms a mass or earth*; it is happy to be a good conductor of flows, but of any flow, a good conductor of information, but of any information, a good conductor of norms, but of any norm, and thereby to reflect the social in its absolute transparency, to give place only to the effects of power and of the social, the latter like constellations fluctuating around this imperceptible nucleus.

The mass is dumb like beasts, and its silence is equal to the silence of beasts. Despite having been surveyed to death (and the constant solicitation, the information, to which it is submitted is

equivalent to experimental torture on laboratory animals), it says neither whether the truth is to the left or to the right, nor whether it prefers revolution or repression. It is without truth and without reason. It has been attributed with every arbitrary remark. It is without conscience and without unconscious.

This silence is unbearable. It is the unknown of the political equation, the unknown which annuls every political equation. Everybody questions it, but never as silence, always to make it speak. But the inertial strength of the masses is unfathomable: literally, no "sounding" or survey will cause it to become evident, since their effect is to blanket it out. A silence which topples the political and the social into the hyperreality with which we associate it. For if the political seeks to "pick up" the masses in a social echo or simulation chamber (the media, information), it is the masses who in return become a huge echo or simulation chamber of the social. Manipulation has never existed. The game is played on both sides, with the same weapons, and who can say which is winning today: the simulation power

performs on the masses, or the inverse simulation held out by the masses for power to be swallowed up in.

Neither Subject Nor Object

The mass realises that paradox of being both an object of simulation (it only exists at the point of convergence of all the media waves which depict it) and a subject of simulation, capable of refracting all the models and of emulating them by hypersimulation (its hyperconformity, an immanent form of humour).

The mass realises that paradox of not being a subject, a group-subject, but of not being an object either. Every effort to make a subject of it (real or mythical) runs head on into the glaring impossibility of an autonomous change in consciousness. Every effort to make an object of it, to treat and analyse it as brute matter, according to objective laws, runs head on into the contrary fact that it is impossible to manipulate the masses in any determinate way, or to understand them in terms of elements, relations, structures and wholes. All manipulation plunges, gets sucked into the mass, absorbed, distorted, reversibilised.

It is impossible to know where it goes; most likely it goes round and round in an endless cycle, foiling every intention on the part of the manipulators. No analysis would know how to contain this diffuse, decentered, Brownian, molecular reality: the notion of object vanishes just as "matter," in the ultimate analysis, vanishes on the horizon of microphysics — it is impossible to comprehend the latter as object once that infinitesimal point is reached where the subject of observation is himself annulled. No more object of knowledge, no more subject of knowledge.

The mass brings about the same insoluble boundary situation in the field of the "social". No longer is it objectifiable (in political terms: no longer is it representable), and it annuls any subject who would claim to comprehend it (in political terms: it annuls anybody who would claim to represent it). Only surveys and statistics (like the law of large numbers and the calculus of probabilities in mathematical physics) can account for it, but one knows that this incantation, this meteoric ritual of statistics and surveys has

no real object, especially not the masses whom it is thought to express. It simply simulates an elusive object, but whose absence is nevertheless intolerable. It "produces" it in the form of anticipated responses, of circular signals which seem to circumscribe its existence and to bear witness to its will. Floating signs — such are surveys — instantaneous signs, intended for manipulation, and whose conclusions can be interchanged. Everybody knows the profound indeterminateness which rules over statistics (the calculus of probabilities or large numbers also correspond to an indeterminateness themselves, to a "Plimsoll line" of the concept of matter, to which again hardly any notion of "objective law" corresponds).

Besides, it is not certain that the procedures of scientific experimentation in the so-called exact sciences have much more truthfulness than surveys and statistics. In any discipline whatsoever, the coded, controlled, "objective" form of inquiry only allows for this circular type of truth, from which the very object aimed at is excluded. In any case, it is possible to think that the uncertainty surrounding this enterprise of the objective determination of the world remains total and that

even matter and the inanimate, when summoned to respond, in the various sciences of nature, in the same terms and according to the same procedures as the masses and "social" beings in statistics and surveys, also send back the same conforming signals, the same coded responses, with the same exasperating, endless conformity, only to better escape, in the last instance, exactly like the masses, any definition as object.

There would thus be a fantastic irony about "matter," and every object of science, just as there is a fantastic irony about the masses in their muteness, or in their statistical discourse so conforming to the questions put to them, akin to the eternal irony of femininity of which Hegel speaks — the irony of a false fidelity, of an excessive fidelity to the law, an ultimately impenetrable simulation of passivity and obedience, and which annuls in return the law governing them, in accordance with the immortal example of Soldier Schweik.

From this would follow, in the literal sense, a *pataphysics* or science of imaginary solutions, a science of the simulation or hypersimulation of

an exact, true, objective world, with its universal laws, including the delirium of those who interpret it according to these laws. The masses and their involuntary humor would introduce us to a pataphysics of the social which ultimately would relieve us of all that cumbersome metaphysics of the social.

This contradicts all received views of the process of truth, but perhaps the latter is only an illusion of judgment. The scientist cannot believe that matter, or living beings, do not respond "objectively" to the questions he puts, or that they respond to them *too* objectively for his questions to be sound. This hypothesis alone seems absurd and unthinkable to him. He will never accept it. He will never leave the enchanted and simulated circle of his enquiry.

The same hypothesis applies everywhere, the same *axiom of credibility*. The adman cannot but believe that people believe in it — however, slightly, that is, that a minimal probability exists of the message reaching its goal and being decoded according to its meaning. Any principle of uncertainty is excluded. If it turned out that the refractive index of this message in the recipient were nil, advertising would instantly collapse. It

only surveys on that belief which it accords itself (this is the same wager as that of science about the objectivity of the world) and which it doesn't try too hard to verify, in terror that the contrary hypothesis might also be true, namely that the great majority of advertising messages never reach their destination, that the viewing public no longer differentiates between the contents, which are refracted in the void. The medium alone functions as an atmospheric effect and acts as spectacle and fascination. THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE, McLuhan prophesied: a formula characteristic of the present phase, the "cool" phase of the whole mass media culture, that of a freezing, neutralisation of every message in a vacuous ether. That of a glaciation of meaning. Critical thought judges and chooses, it produces differences, it is by selection that it presides over meaning. The masses, on the other hand, do not choose, they do not produce differences but a lack of differentiation — they retain a fascination for the medium which they prefer to the critical exigencies of the message. For fascination is not dependent on meaning, it is proportional to the disaffection of meaning. It is obtained by neutralising the message in favour of the medium, by

neutralising the idea of favour of the idol, by neutralising the truth in favour of the simulacrum. It is at this level that the media function. Fascination is their law, and their specific violence, a massive violence denying communication by meaning in favour of another mode of communication. Which one?

For us an untenable hypothesis: that it may be possible to communicate *outside the medium of meaning*, that the very intensity of communication may be proportional to the reabsorption of meaning and to its collapse. For it is not meaning or the increase of meaning which gives tremendous pleasure, but its neutralisation which fascinates (cf. Witz, the operation of wit, in *L'Echange Symbolique et la Mort*). And not by some death drive, which implies that life is still on the side of meaning, but quite simply by defiance, by an allergy to reference, to the message, to the code and to every category of the linguistic enterprise, by a repudiation of all this in favor of imploding the sign in fascination (no longer any signifier or signified: absorption of the poles of signification). None of the guardians of meaning

can understand this: the whole morality of meaning rises up against fascination.

The political sphere also only survives by a credibility hypothesis, namely that the masses are permeable to action and to discourse, that they hold an opinion, that they are present behind the surveys and statistics. It is at this price alone that the political class can still believe that it speaks and that it is politically heard. Even though the political has long been the agent of nothing but spectacle on the screen of private life. Digested as a form of entertainment, half-sports, half-games (see the winning ticket in American elections, or election evenings on radio or TV); like those old comedies of manners, at once both fascinating and ludicrous. For some time now, the electoral game has been akin to TV game shows in the consciousness of the people. The latter, who have always served as alibi and as supernumerary on the political stage, avenge themselves by treating as a *theatrical* performance the political scene and its actors. The people have become a *public*. It is the football match or film or cartoon which serve as models for their perception of the political sphere. The people even enjoy day to day, like a home movie, the fluctuations of

their own opinions in the daily opinion polls. Nothing in all this engages any responsibility. At no time are the masses politically or historically engaged in a conscious manner. They have only ever done so out of perversity, in complete irresponsibility. Nor is this a flight from politics, but rather the effect of an implacable antagonism between the class (caste?) which bears the social the political, culture—master of time and history, and the un(in)formed, residual, senseless mass. The former continually seeks to perfect the reign of meaning, to invest, to saturate the field of the social, the other continually distorts every effect of meaning, neutralises or diminishes them. In this confrontation, the winner is not at all the one you might think.

This can be seen in the shift in value from history to the humdrum, from the public sphere to the private sphere. Up till the 60's, history leads on the downbeat: the private, the ordinary is only the dark side of the political sphere. At best a dialectic plays between the two, and it is to be hoped that one day the ordinary, like the individual, will shine over history, in the universal. But

in the meantime, the withdrawal of the masses into their domestic sphere, their refuge from history, politics and the universal, and their absorption into an idiotic humdrum existence of consumption is only to be lamented (happily they work, which preserves for them an "objective" historical status, while awaiting a change in consciousness). Today, there is a reversal of the downbeat and the upbeat: one begins to foresee that ordinary life, men in their banality, could well not be the insignificant side of history — better: that withdrawing into the private could well be *a direct defiance of the political*, a form of actively resisting political manipulation. The roles are reversed: it is the banality of life, everyday life, everything formerly branded as petit-bourgeois, abject and apolitical (including sex) which becomes the downbeat, with history and the political unfolding their abstract eventuality elsewhere.

A staggering hypothesis. The depoliticised masses would not be this side of the political, but beyond it. The private, the unnamable, the ordinary, the insignificant, petty wiles, petty perversions etc., would not be this side of representation, but beyond it. In their "naive" practice

(and without having waited for analysis of the "end of the political"), the masses would sentence the political to annihilation, they would be spontaneously transpolitical like they are translinguistic in their language.

But take care! Out of this private and asocial universe, which does not enter into a dialectic of representation and of transcendence towards the universal, out of this involutive sphere which is opposed to all revolution from the top and refuses to play the game, some would like to make a new source of revolutionary energy (in particular in its sexual and desire version). They would like to give it meaning and to reinstate it in its very banality, as historical negativity. Exaltation of micro-desires, small differences, unconscious practices, anonymous marginalities. Final somersault of the intellectuals to exalt insignificance, to promote non-sense into the order of sense. And to transfer it back to political reason. Banality, inertia, apoliticism used to be fascist; they are in the process of becoming revolutionary — without changing meaning, without ceasing to have meaning. Micro-revolution of banality, transpolitics of desire — one more trick of the "liberationists". The denial

of meaning has no meaning.

From Resistance to Hyperconformity

The emergence of silent majorities must be located within the entire cycle of historical resistance to the social. Resistance to work of course, but also resistance to medicine, resistance to schooling, resistance to security, resistance to information. Official history only records the uninterrupted progress of the social, relegating to the obscurity reserved for former cultures, as barbarous relics, everything not coinciding with this glorious advent. In fact, contrary to what one might believe (that the social has definitely won, that its movement is irreversible, that consensus *upon* the social is total), resistance to the social in all its forms has progressed *even more rapidly than the social*. It has merely taken other forms than the primitive and violent ones which were subsequently absorbed (the social is alive and well, thank you, only idiots run away from writing and vaccination and the benefits of security). Those frontal resistances still corres-

ponded to an equally frontal and violent period of socialisation, and came from traditional groups seeking to preserve their own culture, their original cultures. It was not the mass in them which resisted, but, on the contrary, differentiated structures, in opposition to the homogeneous and abstract model of the social.

This type of resistance can still be discovered in the "two-step flow of communication" which American sociology has analysed: the mass does not at all constitute a passive receiving structure for media messages, whether they be political, cultural or advertising. Microgroups and individuals, far from taking their cue from a uniform and imposed decoding, decode messages in their own way. They intercept them (through leaders) and transpose them (second level), contrasting the dominant code with their own particular sub-codes, finally recycling everything passing into their own cycle, exactly like primitive natives recycle western money in their symbolic circulation (the Siane of New Guinea) or like the Corsicans recycle universal suffrage and elections in their clan rivalry strategies. This *ruse* is universal: it is a way of redirecting, of absorbing, of victoriously salvaging the material dif-

fused by the dominant culture. It is this which also governs the "magic" usage of the doctor and medicine among the "underdeveloped" masses. Commonly reduced to an antiquated and irrational mentality, we should read in this, on the contrary, an offensive practice, a redirection by excess, an unanalysed but conscious rejection "without knowing it" of the profound devastation wreaked by rational medicine.

But this is still the feat of groups traditionally structured by identity and significance. Quite different is the refusal of socialisation which comes *from the mass*; from an innumerable, unnamable and anonymous group, whose strength comes from its very deconstruction and inertia. Thus, in the case of the media, traditional resistance consists of reinterpreting messages according to the group's own code and for its own ends. The masses, on the contrary, accept everything and redirect everything *en bloc* into the spectacular, without requiring any other code, without requiring any meaning, ultimately without resistance, but making everything slide into an

indeterminate sphere which is not even that of non-sense, but that of overall manipulation/fascination.

It has always been thought — this is the very ideology of the mass media — that it is the media which envelop the masses. The secret of manipulation has been sought in a frantic semiology of the mass media. But it has been overlooked, in this naive logic of communication, that *the masses are a stronger medium than all the media*, that it is the former who envelop and absorb the latter — or at least there is no priority of one over the other. The mass and the media are one single process. Mass(age) is the message.

So it is with movies, whose inventors initially dreamed of a rational, documentary, *social* medium, but which very quickly and permanently swung towards the imaginary.

So it is with technology, science, and knowledge. Condemned to a “magical” practice and to a “spectacular” consumption. So it is with consumption itself. To their amazement, economists have never been able to rationalise consumption, the seriousness of their “theory of need” and the general consensus upon the discourse of utility

being taken for granted. But this is because the practice of the masses very quickly had nothing (or perhaps never had anything) to do with needs. They have turned consumption into a dimension of status and prestige, of useless keeping up with the Joneses or simulation, of potlatch which surpassed use value in every way. A desperate attempt has been made from all sides (official propaganda, consumer societies, ecologues and sociologues) to instil into them sensible spending and functional calculation in matters of consumption, but it is hopeless. For it is by sign/value and the frantic stake in sign/value (which economists, even when they try to integrate it as a variable, have always seen as upsetting economic reason), that *the masses block the economy*, resist the "objective" imperative of needs and the rational balancing of behaviors and ends. Sign/value against use value, this is already a distortion of political economy. And let it not be said that all this ultimately profits exchange value, that is to say the system. For if the system does well out of this game, and even encourages it (the masses "alienated" in gadgets, etc.), this isn't the main thing, and what this slipping, this skidding initiates in the long term — already initiates — is

the end of the economic, cut off from all its rational definitions by the excessive, magic, spectacular, fraudulent and nearly parodic use the masses put it to. An asocial use, resistant to all pedagogies, to all socialist education — an aberrant use whereby the masses (us, you, everybody) have already crossed over to the other side of political economy. They haven't waited for future revolutions nor theories which claim to "liberate" them by a "dialectical" movement. They know that there is no liberation, and that a system is abolished only by pushing it into hyperlogic, by forcing it into an excessive practice which is equivalent to a brutal amortization. "You want us to consume — O.K., let's consume always more, and anything whatsoever; for any useless and absurd purpose."

So it is with medicine: frontal resistance (which hasn't disappeared everywhere) has been replaced by a more subtle form of subversion; an excessive, uncontrollable consumption of medicine, a panicked conformity to health injunctions. A fantastic escalation in medical consumption which completely corrupts the social objectives and finalities of medicine. What better way to abolish it? At present, doctors, manipu-

lated much more than they manipulate, no longer know what they are doing, what they are. "Give us more treatment, doctors, medication, security, health — more, ever further, keep it coming . . . !" The masses alienated in medicine? Not at all: they are in the process of ruining its institution, of making Social Security explode, of putting the social itself in danger by craving always more of it, as with commodities. What greater mockery can there be than this craving for the *social* as an item of *individual* consumption, submitted to an ever-escalating supply and demand? A parody and a paradox: it is by their very inertia in the ways of the social laid out for them that the masses go beyond its logic and its limits, and destroy its whole edifice. A destructive hypersimulation, a destructive hyperconformity (as in the case of Beaubourg, analysed elsewhere⁶) that has all the appearance of a victorious challenge — no one can measure the strength of this challenge, of the reversion exerted on the whole system. There lies the genuine stake today, in this underhand, inescapable confrontation between the silent majority and the social imposed on them, in this hypersimulation reduplicating simulation and exterminating it according to its

own logic — not in any class struggle nor in the molecular hodge-podge of desire-breaching minorities.

Mass and Terrorism

We are therefore at the paradoxical point where the masses refuse the baptism of the social, which is also that of meaning and liberty. Let us not make them into a new and glorious reference. For one thing, they don't exist. But note that all power silently flounders on this silent majority, which is neither an entity nor a sociological reality, but the shadow cast by power, its sinking vortex, its form of absorption. A nebulous fluid, shifting, conforming, far too conforming to every solicitation and with a hyperreal conformity which is the extreme form of non-participation: such is the present calamity of power. Such is also the calamity of revolution. For this implusive mass, by definition, will never explode and every revolutionary promise will implode into it as well. In consequence, what is to be done with these masses? They are the leitmotif of every discourse; they are the obsession of every social

project; but all run aground on them, for all remain rooted in the classical definition of the masses, which is that of an eschatological faith in the social and its fulfillment. Now, the masses *aren't* the social, they are the reversion of any social and of any socialism. Enough theorists have criticised meaning, denounced the traps of liberty and the mystifications of the political, radically censured rationality and every form of representation; however, when the masses wander through meaning, the political, representation, history, ideology, with a somnambulant strength of denial, when they realise here and now everything which the most radical critics have been able to envisage, then the latter know not what to make of it, and persist in dreaming of a future revolution — a critical revolution, a revolution of prestige, that of the social, that of desire. This revolution by involution is not theirs: it is not critical-explosive, it is implosive and blind. It proceeds by inertia, and not from a new and joyous negativity. It is silent and involutive — exactly the reverse of all speech making and consciousness raising. It has no meaning. It has nothing to say to us.

Indeed the only phenomenon which may be in a relation of affinity with it, with these masses such that the final vicissitude of the social and its death is at stake, is terrorism. Nothing is more "cut off from the masses" than terrorism. Power may well try to set the one against the other, but nothing is more strange, more familiar either, than their convergence in denying the social and in refusing meaning. For terrorism claims to really aim at capital (global imperialism, etc.) but it mistakes its enemy, and in doing so it aims at its true enemy, which is the social. Present-day terrorism aims at the social in response to the terrorism of the social. It aims at the social such as it is produced today — the orbital, interstitial, nuclear, tissual network of control and security, which invests us on all sides and produces us, all of us, as a silent majority. A hyperreal, imperceptible sociality, no longer operating by law and repression, but by the infiltration of models, no longer by violence, but by deterrence/persuasion — to that terrorism responds by an *equally hyperreal* act, caught up from the outset in concentric waves of media and of fascination,

dedicated from the outset not to any representation or consciousness, but to a mental downgrading by contiguity, fascination and panic, not to reflection or to the logic of cause and effect, but to a chain reaction by contagion — senseless and indeterminate like the system it combats, into which it insinuates itself rather like a point of maximum and infinitesimal implosion — a non-explosive, non-historical, non-political terrorism: implosive, crystallising, earth-shattering — and for that matter a homologue deep down, of the silence and inertia of the masses.

Terrorism does not aim at making anything speak, at resuscitating or mobilising anything; it has no revolutionary consequences (in this regard, it is rather a complete counter-performance, for which it is violently reproached, but that isn't its game); it aims at the masses in their silence, a silence mesmerised by information; it aims at that white magic of the social encircling us, that of information, of simulation, of deterrence, of anonymous and random control, in order to precipitate its death by accentuating it. It aims at that white magic of social abstraction by the black magic of a still greater, more anonymous, arbitrary and hazardous abstraction: that of the terrorist act.

It is the only non-representative act. In this regard it has an affinity with the masses, who are the only non-representable reality. This is definitely not to say that terrorism would *represent* the silence and the not-said of the masses, that it would violently express their passive resistance. It is simply to say: there is no equivalent to the blind, non-representative, senseless character of the terrorist act, but the blind, senseless and unrepresentational behavior of the masses. What they do have in common is that they are the most radical, most intense contemporary form of the denial of the whole representative system. That is all. No one really knows what relation can be established between two elements that are outside representation, this is a problem of which our epistemology of knowledge permits no resolution, since it always postulates the medium of a subject and of a language, the medium of a representation. We are really only acquainted with representative series, we know little about analogical, affinitive, im-mediatised, non-reference series and other systems. Undoubtedly something very substantial passes between them (the masses and terrorism) which we would seek in vain in the

historical precedents of representative systems (assembly/people, party/proletariat, minorities-marginals/groupuscules...). And just as a positive social energy passes between the two poles of any representative system, it could be said that between the masses and terrorism, between these two non-poles of a non-representative system, also passes an energy, but a *reverse energy*, an energy not of social accumulation and transformation, but of social dispersal, of dispersion of the social, of absorption and annulment of the political.

It cannot be said that it is the "age of the silent majority" which "produces" terrorism. It is the simultaneity of the two which is staggering, and noteworthy. Whether or not one accepts its brutality, it alone truly marks the end of the political and of the social. It alone betrays this reality of a violent implosion of all our systems of representation.

Terrorism does not at all aim at unmasking the repressive character of the State (that is the provocative negativity of groupuscules, who find in this a last chance to be representative in the eyes of the masses). It propagates, by its own non-representativity, and by chain reaction (not by

remonstration and consciousness raising) the apparent non-representativity of all power. Here is its subversion: it precipitates non-representation by injecting it in infinitesimal but very concentrated doses.

Its fundamental violence is to deny all the institutions of representation (unions, organised movements, conscious "political" struggle, etc.), including those who play at solidarity with it, for solidarity is still a way of constituting it as model, as emblem, and hence of assigning it to representation. ("They died for us, their action was not wasted . . .") Any means will do to impose meaning, to disregard how far terrorism is without legitimacy, without political consequences, without any historical continuity. Its only "ripples" are precisely not an historical flow but its story, its shock wave in the media. This story no more belongs to an objective and informative order than terrorism does to the political order. Both are elsewhere, in an order which is neither of meaning nor of representation — mythical perhaps, simulacrum undoubtedly.

The other aspect of terrorist violence is its

disclaiming of any determination and of any quality. In this sense, we must distinguish terrorism from "banditry" and commando action. The latter is an act of war aimed at a determinate enemy (blowing up a train, hurling a bomb into the opposing party's headquarters, etc.). The other is dependent on traditional criminal violence (a bank hold-up, sequestration in exchange for ransom, etc.) All these actions have an economic or martial "objective". Present-day terrorism, initiated by the taking of hostages and the game of postponed death, no longer has any objectives (if it claims to have any, they are ridiculous, or unachievable, and in any case, this is quite the most ineffective method of attaining them), nor any determinate enemy. Do the Palestinians strike at Israel by means of intermediary hostages? No, it is through Israel-as-intermediary that they strike at a mythical, or not even mythical, anonymous, undifferentiated enemy; a kind of omnipresent global social order, whenever, whoever, down to the last of the "innocents." Terrorism is this: it is novel, and insoluble, only because it strikes wherever, whenever, whoever; otherwise it would only be ransom or a military commando act. *Its blindness is the exact*

replica of the system's absolute lack of differentiation. For some time the system has no longer separated ends from means, tormentors from victims. In its deadly and indiscriminate taking of hostages, terrorism strikes at precisely the most characteristic product of the whole system: the anonymous and perfectly undifferentiated individual, the term substitutable for any other. Paradoxically, it seems that the innocent pay the crime of being nothing, of being lotless, of having been dispossessed of their name by an equally anonymous system whose purest incarnation they then become. They are the end products of the social, of a now globalised abstract sociality. It is in this sense, in the sense in which they are precisely *anybody*, that they are the predestined victims of terrorism.

It is in this sense, or rather in this defiance of sense, that the terrorist act is akin to the natural catastrophe. There is no difference between an earthquake in Guatemala and the hijacking of a Lufthansa Boeing with three hundred passengers on board, between the "natural" intervention and

the "human" terrorist intervention. Nature is terrorist, as is the abrupt failure of the whole technological system: the great New York black-outs ('65 and '77) create more wonderful terrorist situations than the true ones, dream situations. Better: these great technological accidents, like great natural accidents, illustrate the possibility of a radical *subjectless* subversion. The power failure of '77 in New York could have been instigated by a very organised terrorist group; that would have changed nothing in its objective outcome. The same acts of violence, of pillage, the same undermining, the same suspension of the "social" order would have ensued from it. This signifies that terrorism is not a step of violence, but is everywhere in the normality of the social, such that from one moment to the next it can be transfigured into an inverse, absurd, uncontrollable reality. The natural catastrophe acts in this sense and so, paradoxically, it becomes the *mythical expression* of the catastrophe of the social. Or rather the natural catastrophe being a meaningless, non-representative vicissitude par excellence (unless representative of God, which is why the person in charge of Continental Edison was able to speak of God and his intervention during the last New

York blackout), it becomes a kind of symptom or violent incarnation of the state of the social, namely of its catastrophe and of the collapse of every representation supporting it.
it.

Implosive Systems, Explosive Systems

In their triangular affinity, the masses, the media and terrorism describe the presently prevailing process of implosion. The whole process is affected by a violence which is only just beginning, an orbital and nuclear violence of intake and fascination, a violence of the void (fascination is the extreme intensity of the *neutral*). For us today, implosion can only be violent and catastrophic because it comes from the *failure* of the system of explosion and of organised expansion which has predominated in the West now for a few centuries.

Implosion is not necessarily a catastrophic process. In a subdued and controlled form, it has even been the main secret of primitive and tradi-

tional societies. Not expansive or centrifugal configurations, but centripetal ones: singular pluralities never directed towards the universal, but centered about a cyclic process — ritual — and tending to “involve” in a non-representative, unauthoritarian process; without any disjunctive polarity, yet without caving in on themselves either (save undoubtedly for certain implosive processes which are inexplicable to us, like the collapse of the Toltec, Olmec, Mayan cultures, nothing of which is known any more, and whose pyramidal empires disappeared without a trace, without any visible catastrophe, as though suddenly abandoned, without any apparent cause, without any external violence). Thus primitive societies have survived by a *controlled implosion* — they died as soon as they ceased to control this process, and switched over to one of explosion (demography, or uncontrollable surplus production, a process of uncontrollable expansion, or quite simply when colonisation violently initiated them into the expansive and centrifugal norm of Western systems).

Conversely, our “modern” civilisations have existed on a base of expansion and explosion at all levels, under the sign of universalised

commerce, of economic and philosophical investments, under the sign of universal law and conquest. Undoubtedly even they have known how to survive, for a time at least, on a *controlled explosion*, on a liberation of subdued and progressive energy, and this was the golden age of their culture. But, according to a process of boom and acceleration, this explosive process has become uncontrollable, it has acquired a fatal speed or amplitude, or rather it has reached the limits of the universal, it has saturated the field of possible expansion and, just as primitive societies were ravaged by explosion for not knowing how to curb the implosive process any longer, so our culture begins to be ravaged by implosion for not having known how to curb and equilibrate the explosive process.

Implosion is inevitable, and every effort to save the principles of reality, of accumulation, of universality, the principles of evolution which extol expanding systems, is archaic, regressive or nostalgic. Including all those who want to free libidinal energies, plural energies, fragmentary intensities, etc. The "molecular revolution" only represents the final stage of "liberation of energy" (or of proliferation of segments, etc.) up to the in-

finitesimal boundaries of the field of expansion which has been that of our culture. The infinitesimal attempt of desire succeeding the infinite attempt of capital. The molecular solution succeeding the molar investment of spaces and the social. The final sparks of the explosive system, the final attempt to still control an energy of confines, or to shrink the confines of energy (our fundamental leitmotif) so as to save the principle of expansion and of liberation.

But nothing will halt the implosive process, and the only remaining alternative is between a violent or catastrophic implosion, and a smooth implosion, an implosion in slow motion. There are traces of the latter, of various attempts to control new impulses which are anti-universalist, anti-representative, tribal, centripetal, etc.: communes, ecology, ZPG, drugs — all of these undoubtedly belong to this order. But we must not delude ourselves about a smooth transition. It is doomed to be short lived and to fail. There has been no balanced transition from implosive systems to explosive systems: this has always happened violently, and there is every chance that our passage towards implosion may also be violent and catastrophic.